

you united in our course, determined to advance together to help the daily lives of our people in better jobs, safer streets, cleaner air, brighter hopes for our children and their future.

We are here to help our economies grow and to grow closer by opening our markets, protecting our workers, and sharing more fairly the benefits of prosperity. We are here to give all our people the tools to succeed in the global economy by making good education the birth-right of every citizen of every country here. We are here to strengthen our democracies by standing against the criminals, the drug traffickers, the smugglers who exploit open borders to threaten open societies. And we are here to protect our future by launching new efforts to prevent pollution and protect our precious natural environment.

When President Kennedy came to Costa Rica more than three decades ago, he said, "Every generation of the Americas has shaped new goals for democracy to suit the demands of a new age. Our generation must meet that chal-

lenge, and we must do it together. We know that we must not be just neighbors but real partners, working together in a spirit of friendship, equality, and mutual respect."

My fellow citizens of the Americas, that is the partnership we have come here to build. Here in the heart of our hemisphere, let us go forward into a bright new century full of unlimited possibilities for our young, knowing that to realize those possibilities we must go forward together.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:27 a.m. at the National Theater Plaza. In his remarks, he referred to the following summit participants: President Jose Maria Figueres of Costa Rica; Prime Minister Manuel Esquivel of Belize; President Leonel Fernandez of the Dominican Republic; President Alvaro Arzu of Guatemala; President Carlos Roberto Reina of Honduras; President Arnoldo Aleman of Nicaragua; and President Armando Calderon of El Salvador.

The President's News Conference With Central American Leaders in San Jose

May 8, 1997

President Figueres. Good afternoon, friends. I wish to express on behalf of the heads of state and of government of Central America and the Dominican Republic how pleased we are with the results of the extraordinary work session we have had this morning with President Clinton. It has been a very sincere dialog, a very realistic dialog, a very human dialog, and especially, a very friendly dialog.

I would like to share with you four main conclusions which are the outcome of our discussions and which are reflected in the joint declaration which we have just signed. First of all, we've inaugurated a new phase, a new stage in the relations among our countries. We attach a very special importance to this alliance. It reflects a new visional mood, a more optimistic one, a more mature one, and a more propositional one. And it also demonstrates the existence of a shared agenda, the fundamental objective of which is the well-being of our peoples through the consolidation of economies which

are more and more open and integrated. And we have ratified this will.

Secondly, we wish to emphasize the brotherly spirit, the friendship and the understanding which have prevailed in our discussion of topics which we knew were sensitive and complex. We have made a special effort to reach agreements, to compromise and to understand the realities which our Governments face. Beyond those realities, we found a will to work together, and we have opened areas for this dialog to continue and for our collective action.

Third, we underlined the importance of having maintained, as a constant concern of this meeting, the social issues, the importance of which for Latin America and for our region is more vital today than ever before. We share a special concern with the more needy, a concern which reflects solidarity, not charity, as a means to generate opportunities for productive employment and to ensure the dignified life which our peoples demand.

I especially wish to recognize the contribution of women to the developing of economic democracy and how urgent it is to guarantee non-discriminatory treatment for them in the workplaces, in political life, and in social relations generally. All this should have a significant impact in the improvement of the quality of life of the coming generations.

Finally, we wish to stress the significant role which environmental issues continue to have on our agenda. We have deepened and expanded the scope of the joint declaration of Central America and the United States, CONCAUSA, and in doing so, we have helped our region move even further forward as one of those regions which are noted throughout the world for their commitment to the rational use and intelligent use of our natural resources. In this regard, we can state that the decisions we've adopted in this field in this declaration can be characterized as revolutionary at a hemispherical level.

An essential element to attain institutional strengthening and to ensure good governance of our countries has to do with the possibility of expanding our markets and stimulating investments which generate employment and improve the quality of life. I believe that with respect to both topics, free trade and investment, we have moved forward in an impressive manner in attaining a better understanding and in acceptance that reciprocity should be the new byword in the establishment of all our discussions.

Ladies and gentlemen, the President and the Prime Minister of Belize and the Dominican Republic would like to make a special mention to the democratic circumstance that prevails in all the region: We are committed to strengthen and perfecting it.

We are aware that, at the threshold of the 21st century, it is not enough to guarantee access to free, fair, and transparent elections for our citizens. Threatened by formidable enemies such as narcotrafficking and organized crime, it is indispensable to fortify democratic institutions and to ensure ways in which civil society can participate more effectively in the decision-making process.

Nonetheless, it is through the development of dynamic economies and more equitable social structures that we will be able to fully grasp the benefits of democratic governance. To this regard, we are convinced that one indispensable element to ensure such democratic governance

has to do with the possibility to expand our markets and, with it, stimulate investments that generate employment and improve the quality of life of our populations.

Both issues, trade and investment, were positively reinforced during our meeting with President Clinton, and we would like to emphasize our satisfaction as the new criteria that will guide our next steps towards the construction of free-trade zones in the Americas.

In closing, let me emphasize the warmth of this meeting. You, President Clinton, with your insight and your thoughtfulness, have come to Central America and with our friends from the Dominican Republic have given a new dimension to our relations. We all came here with high expectations. We had the opportunity to share our thoughts but express the feelings of our hearts. And we all part full of optimism, ready to continue our work, work that is circumscribed by the need we all have to continue bettering the conditions of living of our people.

Thank you very much.

President Clinton. President Figueres has given an excellent statement. I will just make a few brief comments. First of all, I know I speak for all of us who are guests here in thanking the President and the people of Costa Rica for their warmth and hospitality.

This is truly a new day for Central America. The transition from conflict to cooperation has changed the relationship among the Central American countries and between the United States and Central America. A decade ago, we focused on civil wars. Now, together, we are fighting against poverty and fighting for prosperity, stronger democracy, and the sustainable development of our precious resources.

It is this new reality, this new agenda that we share which brings us here to San Jose for the first summit meeting between the leaders of the United States, Central America, and the Dominican Republic in 30 years. The people of Central America have chosen peace and democracy. We must help them to prove that they made the right choice, that democracy delivers.

Today, we agreed to an intensified ongoing dialog between the United States, Central America, and the Dominican Republic to work together on issues that will make a real difference to the lives of all our people with a high level, follow-on structure to make sure that our commitments are realized.

Together we looked at ways to strengthen our democracies and to combat the drugs, crime, and corruption that threaten to undermine them. I'm encouraged by the growing cooperation among Central American law enforcement authorities, including the creation of a joint center for police studies in El Salvador. To advance it further, the United States plans to establish an international law enforcement academy in Latin America by the end of this year, modeled on our successful academy in Budapest. We also agreed to modernize extradition treaties and to apply them vigorously. Those who commit a crime in one nation in our region should know that they will have no place to run and hide elsewhere in the region.

We took important steps to broaden the benefits of open and competitive trade. Our trade with Central America exceeded \$20 billion last year. That is a 120-percent increase since 1990. This dramatic increase is the direct result of the progress the nations of this region have made toward improving their economies and opening their markets.

To identify concrete actions we can take to expand commerce even more, and to explore ways to move toward our common goal of a free trade area of the Americas by 2005, we created a ministerial level trade and investment council.

The open skies agreement we signed today—the first in our hemisphere—are a powerful example of how we can move forward together. They will allow our air carriers greater freedom to increase passenger and cargo services, to lower prices for travelers and shippers, and literally to bring the Americas closer together.

Today, we also agreed that our labor ministers will meet later this year to exchange ideas on promoting respect for worker rights and improving working conditions. And we discussed the issue of immigration. I'm proud that the United States has a tradition of generous legal immigration. Last year, over 900,000 people legally immigrated to the United States. I will do what I can to preserve it because I believe America's diversity is one of our greatest strengths as we move into a new century in an increasingly global society.

But to maintain that tradition and to do what is right by people who immigrate to the United States legally, it is also necessary that we be more effective in stopping illegal immigration. Our new immigration law is designed to accom-

plish that objective. I appreciate the decision by several Central American nations to criminalize the terrible practice of alien smuggling, which is also a scourge to all of us.

I do want you to know that enforcing our laws, I am determined to balance the need for firm controls against illegal immigration with common sense and compassion. Our country has greatly benefitted from the talents and the energies of Central Americans who came to our shores because they were fleeing civil war. Today, the remarkable progress in that region means that many can return home. But we want that to occur in a manner which avoids destabilizing the nations and the economies of Central America, or creating enormous hardships for children and families.

There will be no mass deportations and no targeting of Central Americans under this law. I am working with Congress to implement the new law so that it does not produce these unintended results.

Finally, we explored ideas to make a good education the birthright of every child in this region. We agreed that education should be a centerpiece of next year's Summit of the Americas in Santiago, for which today's summit is an important building block.

This has been a full and a productive session. Again, let me thank my colleagues for the passion and the depth of commitment they bring to this enterprise, and to our shared vision for a new partnership between the United States and Central America on the brink of a new century. Thank you very much.

Extradition Policy and NAFTA Membership

Q. Good afternoon. Thank you very much, Mr. President. I have two questions. For you, Mr. President Figueres, I'd like to know, within the declaration, in the chapter on strengthening democracy and good governance, I'd like to know what should be understood in the paragraph that says that we take on the commitment to update our extradition treaty and apply it vigorously to make sure that criminals are taken to justice, where the effects of their crime are felt more severely.

If we are dealing here with a paragraph that is somehow suggesting for the future any possibility of extraditing our citizens—[inaudible]—that the Central American contingency meet in order to be considered by your country to be

part of the free trade agreement and if so, if we are, after Chile, the next one—[inaudible].

President Clinton. I was listening—[inaudible]—you started talking in Spanish.

Q. Okay, so here again. My question is—[inaudible]—[laughter].

President Clinton. It's been a long day. [Laughter]

Q. Thank you. What do you think the conditions that Central American countries should meet in order to be considered by your country to be part of the Free Trade Agreement, and if we do meet those requirements, are we the next after Chile? Thank you.

President Figueres. The biggest—[inaudible]—is that respecting our constitutions and the independence of the branches of government in our countries, the judiciary and the legislative. We will continue cooperating in these areas which have to do with ensuring citizen security. And in accordance with our responsibility as Presidents with respect to our population, I think we should work out together combating drug trafficking, money laundering, and these modern scourges which have been developing in our societies and which can only cause harm to our societies.

This is a reaffirmation of our will to continue working in that direction, with respect to our constitutions and to our legal provisions. We are all states under the rule of law, fortunately.

President Clinton. I would like to make one comment about that from the point of view of the United States. We do not believe that our sovereignty is undermined by extraditing people through our countries as long as they follow the same rules with us, so that we both respect each other's criminal justice system.

Now, let me answer your question. First of all, I believe that the nations of Central America have already gone a long way toward becoming part of a free-trade area by embracing democracy, open markets, and committing themselves to expanded trade, and committing themselves to increasing international cooperation. After all, we have the President of the Inter-American Development Bank here, we have the Secretary General of the OAS here. We are all working together more. We are committed already, the United States is, to working with all the nations that are here present to establish a free-trade area of the Americas by 2005, which is not so very far away.

Now, in between now and then, can we do more to have reciprocal open trade with the Central American countries? I believe we can, and I have agreed to two steps. The first is that we have set up a ministerial trade and investment council here, as a result of this communique, to identify what the next concrete steps are. But, before that, I have proposed in my budget an expansion of the Caribbean Basin Initiative, and I have funded it over the next 5 years, which would permit us to reduce or eliminate tariffs on a large number of other items coming from Central America that would further deepen our trade relations.

So, I'm strongly supportive of it. I think the big steps have already been taken. The next steps are subject to agreement by our trade negotiators and people who are concerned about investment. And they can be worked out if we stay on the path we're on.

Terry [Terence Hunt, Associated Press]

Central America-U.S. Relations

Q. Mr. President, some of the leaders here today and some other prominent Central American figures have complained in recent days that the United States pays attention to this region only in times of war and in times of natural disaster. Do you think that that has been a valid criticism?

And to President Figueres, what, if anything, has President Clinton said today that makes you think that that attitude would change?

President Clinton. Well, first of all, I think there is some validity to that criticism—that is, I think there are some sectors of our society that may have been more interested in Central America when it was a battleground in the cold war or when it could at least be interpreted to have been a battleground in the cold war. But I don't think it's a fair characterization of America as a whole or of the attitude of this administration.

After all, we convened the Summit of the Americas including all the democratically elected leaders of Central America and the Caribbean and the rest of Latin America in 1994. We have worked diligently since then in meeting with and working with various leaders in this area. We have worked for the cause of peace in Central America and applauded it when it prevailed.

And this meeting here, which as I said, is the first time since 1968 when President Johnson met with the leaders of Central America,

the Dominican Republic that such a meeting has occurred, and this one has a different agenda. This is designed to send the message that we believe it is in the interest of the United States and the people of the United States, as well as the right thing to do, to have an economic and a political partnership with Central America as we move into the new century.

President Figueres. I—[inaudible]—to this meeting with a completely different perspective of what our relationship should be. The old relationship that we have had in the past is no longer the one that can most benefit us in the world of a globalized economy. And today, we have all come as true partners to share the responsibilities of our development and to look for common paths through which we can develop. Central America today, fully democratic and in peace, is willing to pull its own weight, and we are perfectly well aware of the responsibilities in that respect that we have as leaders of our nations. This is truly the beginning of a great new partnership.

Q. Good afternoon, Presidents. For President Clinton. The countries of Central America have been complaining—complaining that the United States has abandoned Central America lately. Aside from progressively, steadily liberalizing trade, in what other way could the United States help the people of Central America—for meetings such as this not be considered as social events with rather rhetorical results that have nothing to do with reality?

President Clinton. Well, I think there are lots of specific ways we can work with Central America apart from trade, and I mentioned one in my remarks. We intend to establish a law enforcement academy in Latin America that will serve the people of Central America in helping them to develop professional police forces that are effective and respects human rights and effective judicial systems.

We did this in Central Europe, with one in Budapest, and we have worked with a lot of former communist countries in the area of law enforcement cooperation in a way that has been extraordinarily well received there, and I believe will be here.

Last night when President Figueres and I had a chance to meet, and again today in our larger meeting, I reaffirmed our willingness to work with countries of Central America to help to expand educational opportunities and to bring the benefits of educational technology to all stu-

dents. And I think there are great opportunities there. I think there are enormous opportunities for us to cooperate in the environmental areas in ways that will be helpful to the long-term stability of the nations that are represented here.

So those are just three areas in which I expect there to be significantly increased cooperation in the years ahead. In addition to that, as you know, we still have some modest aid programs. The Peace Corps is active in many of these nations, doing very constructive things. So I expect that there will be other things which will be done in the years ahead.

Keep in mind, the United States has finally voted for the first time since 1969—at least we have an agreement with the leaders of the Congress—to balance our budget. And that will permit us the freedom and the economic stability, I think, to be a better partner with our neighbors in a whole range of other areas. But the most important thing is for you to prove that your economy will work. And I think the plan we're following will enable you to do that.

Paul [Paul Basken, United Press International].

Immigration Law

Q. Mr. President, Central American leaders before this meeting were saying the new U.S. immigration laws are causing major economic and political headaches. A State Department official was quoted today as saying that, given the situation in Congress, all you have been able to offer them today was "words and promises and hot air." Did that turn out to be true, and what do you realistically expect to get from Congress on immigration between now and the date of September 30th, set out in the statement today?

And, for President Figueres, if you could, are the Central American leaders overreacting to the situation?

President Clinton. Well, first of all, let's describe what the situation is. There are a lot of immigrants living in the United States from the countries that are represented here today who came to the United States primarily because of upheaval caused in their countries during wars. Some of those immigrants are there legally, but not as legal immigrants. That is, there is a separate category of our immigration law which says if you're, in effect, fleeing political disruption in your own country, you can stay in our country but you don't become a legal

immigrant with the right to apply for citizenship after 5 years. But many of them have been there quite a long while. Some of them are not legal under that status but they've been there quite a long while, and they did come because of the political upheaval.

There are two real problems with just shipping all of them up and sending them home, aside from the practical problems of whether it can be done or not. One is that a lot of them have been in the United States so long that they have families there, they have children in school, they have lives that are intertwined with their communities. And it would be significantly disruptive and unfair to the families and the children.

The other is that a lot of—such a dislocation would rob a lot of these countries of cash remittances that a lot of these folks are sending back home to their families which take the place of a lot of foreign aid or domestic economic activity in keeping the country going. And also, that level of influx would destabilize them.

So I think it's fair to say that everyone who studied this understands that the Central American countries—a number of them are in a very special category when it comes to dealing with the immigration laws.

The immigration law that we passed was designed to help us stop illegal immigration at the border, in the workplace, and in the court system. And it will achieve that. But we have to implement it in a way that is humane and recognizes the special problems created here.

So what I have said is that, number one, for the immigrants that are there legally, but not as legal immigrants—that is, they're in the category of people fleeing political problems at home—the law says that I can only exempt 4,000 people from being sent back to their countries. I will not trigger that law until September, the end of September, during which time I will work with Congress to try to figure out how to implement it.

As to people who are generally not in America legally, there will be no mass deportations and no targeting of any citizens from any country. They will have to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

And again, I will say, I'm not so sure, as whoever your anonymous source was, that the Congress will be unwilling to recognize the fact that these Central American countries are in a rather special category. After all, the United

States Government was heavily involved with a lot of these countries during the time of all this upheaval. And just as we were quite generous—and we should have been—in welcoming Vietnamese people to our shores after the termination of our involvement in Vietnam, where our country did not prevail, in these nations where democracy has prevailed and we want to work with them to succeed, it seems to me we ought to be sensitive to the disruptions that were caused during those tough years that we were involved in as a nation. So I'm not so sure we can't get some treatments.

But the law itself, I want to say, as I said in Mexico, it's a good thing that we try to stop illegal immigration because if we don't, we won't be able to keep the American people in support of legal immigration. So we have to stop it as much as we can. But we have to understand, these Central American countries are in a different category because of what they went through in the 1980s.

President Figueres. I feel that we have advanced a lot on this subject, which is certainly important to the Central American nations for many of the reasons that President Clinton has just mentioned. But on this issue of immigration, your question was, has there been an overreaction in Central America. I don't believe that there has been an overreaction, and I believe that we have achieved substantial progress.

If I may, on that, I would like to call perhaps on President Armando Calderon Sol, because he is really the one that, in terms of Central America, with President Arnaldo Aleman, led the conversation.

President Calderon. I would just like to add that, for us, this new relationship that we have begun between Central America and the United States, at the time of President Clinton's visit is profoundly significant. It represents a recognition by the United States, a recognition of the contribution that our people make to their economy, a recognition of the human drama that our people are experiencing in the United States because of what happens here, because this was the theater of operations of the cold war, here in Central America, to hear this from the President of the United States and to hear the profoundly humane position that he adopts when he looks at the people which have had so much pain, for us is very encouraging. And he has stated very clearly that there will not be mass deportations, that they will seek to work more

flexibly with the new immigration law, that there is time from now until September for a joint initiative with the Congress and to awaken more awareness within the Congress concerning this issue which is so important for Central America.

Today is a very important day, a day of great hope for all Central Americans who, because of some of the tragic conditions of violence, had to leave to seek new shores, to find refuge in the United States.

President Figueres. One last question.

Central America-U.S. Trade

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. The question first for President Figueres, don't you think there's very little scope in having the support of the U.S. Government for a draft that would provide to expand the benefits of the Caribbean Basin Initiative when the countries of the region would like to have something more specific than that before the year 2005?

And President Clinton, don't you think that mere support of good will for a draft is actually a very small guarantee for the Central American countries when there is a Congress which is actually against anything that has to do with free trade or unions or even the Democrats, themselves?

President Figueres. With respect to trade, I feel that we have made major progress. These countries have benefitted from the Caribbean Basin Initiative for a number of years now. And this program is the basis on which we have been able to expand our exports from the entire region into traditional markets and also into new markets.

The program that the executive branch of the United States is submitting to the Congress differs from the situation of the past. It contains funds to be able to counteract the loss of tariff income, which would mean expanding the list of products and the exemptions for many of the products coming from this region.

Moreover, I think it is vitally important that we have agreed here to ask our ministers, the ministers who are involved in foreign trade, to task them with finding new ways, new creative ways to continue working together as a region with an eye to the year 2005, the date for which our continent plans to integrate. So the idea would be that we could advance even more in the field of trade before that date comes.

With respect to trade, Laura [Laura Martinez, Television 7, Costa Rica], we need to stress in-

vestment. I think this meeting, this summit meeting, in many ways, is a stamp of approval for the profound reforms that have been led by the Presidents of the area in the different countries. Today, the economies are much more open and much more competitive. They are true democracies and, of course, this opens up our doors to greater flows of investment. And ultimately, this is the way for us to integrate better.

President Clinton. I would like to try to respond to your question with two points. First of all, this is not a—from our point of view—a vague commitment. I think you should see this in three steps—the question of how we might expand our trade between the United States and Central American countries.

Number one, I have presented a budget to the Congress which, if the Congress will go along, provides for the reduction of tariffs over the next 5 years on a lot of other goods which would increase trade with both Central America and the Caribbean. It is fully paid for in my budget. And therefore, I think we will have—we have some chance of passing it, perhaps a good chance. And I certainly intend to fight hard for it. So there's that step.

Then the second step is that we have agreed to bring our trade and investment ministers together to identify what we do after that, what more can we do. Then the third step is adopting the free-trade area of the Americas by 2005.

I know 2005 sounds like a long time away, especially if you're very young, but it's not so very long. And if you think about what will then be a trading area of over a billion people, it is a stunning achievement if we can pull it off. So I am not excluding the possibility that we can do more than expand the Caribbean Basin Initiative, nor am I taking for granted that it will be done, but that is the three-step process I see.

Now, the larger point you made is that the Congress of the United States is opposed to free trade. That may not be true. There are strong opponents of expanded trade in the Congress, but there are also very strong supporters. Some people are just against trade because they think it gives the United States a bad deal. I think the evidence is squarely against them. The more we open our markets, the better our economy does. And we have wages going up for the first time in 20 years, and last year, more than half the new jobs, for the first time in many years, coming into our economy were

above average wage. So trade is good for us, not bad.

Secondly, we can get a lot of people in my party—you mentioned my party specifically—we can get a lot of people in my party to vote for a fast-track authority if our trading partners will give serious attention to the question of making sure that all people in our country get to participate in the benefits of expanded trade and wealth. That's why I have advocated that we set up a labor forum to go with the business forum that will meet as we work toward a free-trade area of the Americas. The more Americans believe that all ordinary working people in other countries will benefit from expanded trade, the more likely we are to find support for it in the Congress.

Yes, ma'am.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. I have a question for you and one question for the Presidents of Central America. Regionally, Central America was looking for NAFTA parity, and then later they changed things, that they preferred to have a free trade agreement. Given the sentiments in Congress, what do you personally believe is the best venue, the most effective to get that free trade agreement? And also, when do you expect to have a fast-track authority with Congress?

And also, for the Presidents of Central America—President Figueres or any of the other Presidents that you are going to seek an amnesty with regard to immigration. I don't know if you asked for that amnesty of President Clinton, and if so, what was his response?

President Clinton. Let me answer your question quite succinctly. I think the best course is for me first to try to pass my budget which contains an expansion of the Caribbean Basin Initiative; and second, to try to pass fast-track authority in the Congress this year, which I fully intend to do my best to do. We're going to work very hard on that. And at the same time, then, to consult with leaders of the Congress in both parties who favor this approach about what they believe the best way to proceed is, because we're all going to have to work together on this.

While we're consulting with Congress, there will be this meeting of our ministers, all of our ministers, identifying what they think the next step should be to continue to expand trade. So I think that our road map is quite clear, and that is the one I intend to pursue.

President Figueres. With respect to the question of immigration, it has already been covered by Armando Calderon Sol, but I would like to go back to your question with respect—that, first, Central America wanted parity and then later on began to look for other ways to acquire more investment and how do we think is the best. Don Alvaro Arzu discussed this issue extensively this morning in the forum, and I would like to invite him to answer your question.

President Arzu. Thank you. What we have stressed and tried to demonstrate is that the region of Central America is prepared, is ready. It's no longer time for us to be reaching out our hands to ask for support, although we are grateful for the support we have received. But instead, we have a desire for a more longstanding, a more permanent relationship of partnership, and more than that, we want a free trade agreement. This is our aspiration.

We need to follow certain parameters, which are requirements, with Congress for example; also with public opinion, the press—[inaudible]—in communication. But what we mostly want to tell the American union is that we are ready. In Central America, we are ready to compete. We are ready to receive investment. We are ready to generate production. And we are ready to diversify the results and the profits that we attract among the large mass of impoverished people in our region in order to begin shrinking the very profound socioeconomic gap that we still have. So we want to go beyond that, and I think we can do it.

Thank you.

President Figueres. Thank you. This concludes the press conference.

NOTE: The President's 144th news conference began at 1:20 p.m. at the National Theater. President Jose Figueres of Costa Rica spoke in Spanish and English, and his Spanish remarks were translated by an interpreter. President Armando Calderon of El Salvador and President Alvaro Arzu of Guatemala spoke in Spanish, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter. In his remarks, President Clinton referred to Inter-American Development Bank President Enrique V. Iglesias and Organization of American States Secretary General Cesar Gaviria.

Declaration of San Jose May 8, 1997

We, the Presidents of Costa Rica, El Salvador, the United States of America, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic and the Prime Minister of Belize, meeting in San Jose, Costa Rica on May 8, 1997, hereby reaffirm the remarkable democratic transformation in Central America. Central America is now a region of peace, liberty and democracy, profoundly committed to a process of integration, in which a spirit of harmony, cooperation, pluralism and respect for human rights prevails. This spirit marks an unprecedented era of stability in Central America's history.

We hold the conviction that the resources and potential of Central America and the Dominican Republic can now be focussed so as to ensure that our peoples are able to develop to their full potential within the framework of just and democratic societies. We are determined to march toward the future in a partnership based on friendship, understanding and ever stronger cooperation. This meeting marks the inauguration of a new stage in our relations, based on mutual respect and reciprocity which will give our nations greater advantages with which to successfully meet the challenges of the next millennium.

We recognize that there are great challenges that we must jointly assume and that there are many opportunities which favor the creation of a great region of shared prosperity among Central America, the Dominican Republic and the United States, as well as the creation of a visionary and creative association among our nations.

Inspired by the principles and goals of the Summit of the Americas and guided by the Central American Alliance for Sustainable Development, we recognize as the cornerstones of this renewed relationship the promotion of prosperity through the strengthening of democracy and good governance; dialogue on immigration and illegal migrant trafficking; economic integration and free trade; the continued development of just and equitable societies that provide opportunities for all people; and the development of responsible environmental policies as an integral element of sustainable development; all of which must be undertaken within a framework of mutual cooperation.

Strengthening of Democracy and Good Governance

We reaffirm our profound conviction that only democratically elected governments can guarantee the full existence of the rule of law, an indispensable prerequisite for the preservation of peace and harmony.

We reaffirm our belief in the dignity of our people and our commitment to the rule of law. We maintain that crime is one of the principal threats to the democracy, public security and social stability of our countries. For this reason, we will redouble our efforts to combat crime and improve security for our people. Consistent with our constitutional provisions and recognizing the independence of our legislative and judicial branches, we are committed to the modernization of extradition treaties and their vigorous application to help ensure that criminals are brought to justice where the effect of their crime is felt most severely.

We resolve to intensify our national efforts and to increase bilateral, multilateral and regional cooperation to combat drug consumption, drug trafficking, money laundering and illegal drug activity in all its manifestations. We reaffirm our commitment to fight corruption through mutual cooperation and the strengthening of oversight institutions and we agree to seek ratification of the Organization of American States' Interamerican Convention Against Corruption. We instruct our Ministers responsible for public security and law enforcement, and other appropriate authorities, to work together to develop a plan of action this year to combat these threats to the welfare of our people.

The Presidents of the United States and the Dominican Republic, and the Prime Minister of Belize express their support for the progress achieved by the Central American Presidents in redefining regional security within a framework of the rule of law, the enhancement of democratic institutions by strengthening civilian authority, the limiting of the role of the armed forces and public security forces to their constitutional mandates, and the fostering of a culture of peace, dialogue, understanding and tolerance based on common democratic values. The strong commitment to these principles serves